



FRANCESCO PETRARCA

*How a Ruler Ought to Govern His State**



Translated by BENJAMIN G. KOHL

For a long time now, distinguished sir, I have been meaning to write to you. And you have, in your usual way, gently reproved me, so that I am now aware that I have omitted your name from among the names of the many great men and men of middle rank to whom I have addressed letters. This omission is especially disgraceful when I consider the patronage that I have received from you and your father. Indeed, it would be an enormous act of ingratitude if I should let myself forget the thanks and affection that I should always hold for you. Therefore, I have decided to write to you even though I am still undecided where I ought to begin and on what topic. This indecision does not derive from the lack of a suitable subject matter, but rather from a perplexing abundance of material, so that I feel like a traveler poised at a crossroads. On the one hand, your great and constant generosity compels me to tender you my deepest thanks. Indeed, it is a time-honored custom to give thanks to friends and especially to princes for their gifts, and I have done so to you many times. On the other hand, you have so daily and continually laden me with gifts and honors that I, weighted down with the number and magnitude of your gifts, cannot ever hope to repay you adequately with mere

* Complete translation of *Rerum Senilium liber XIV. Ad magnificum Franciscum de Carraria Padue dominum. Epistola I. Qualis esse debeat qui rem publicam regit*, ed. V. Ussani (Padua, 1922).

words. Rather, I think that it would be better to pass over such generosity in respectful silence than to try and repay it with inadequate words.

So I leave aside this matter of gratitude and turn to the vast and easy task of singing your praises. Now and again it has been the custom of many men to praise princes (and indeed I have done so myself occasionally), not in order to gain favors from those who are praised as much as to pay homage to the truth and to spur the prince on to greatness with the very stimulus of praise to a generous mind, which is a spur more powerful than anything else. For in these matters of giving praise I find nothing more offensive than adulation or an inconstant attitude. There are those indeed who would praise unworthy men and there are others who, having praised their subjects, promptly begin to vituperate them with an incredible turn of mind. I know of nothing more dishonorable, more base, than this. And in this matter so especially notorious was Cicero (whom I esteem and admire more than any other ancient author) that I feel almost compelled to hate him. Cicero did this to many people, but, most significantly, he ladened and honored Julius Caesar with a wealth of praise and then subjected Caesar to insults and abuse. Read Cicero's letters to his brother Quintus, in which everything said there about Caesar is friendly and complimentary. But then turn to his letters to Atticus, in which you first will find mixed feelings toward Caesar and finally even hatred and reproach. Read Cicero's orations, spoken before Caesar alone or before him when he was present in the Senate; so great are these praises of Caesar that they seem unmerited by any mortal and beyond the capacity of a mortal genius to compose. But read further in the book *On Duties* and in the Philippic orations and you will find expressions of hatred equal to the former affection and base abuse comparable to earlier praise. What makes these great changes in Cicero's attitude even worse is that Cicero gave Caesar nothing but praise while he was alive and nothing but vituperation after he was dead. I would have been able to tolerate this much more easily if Cicero had criticized Caesar when he was alive and praised him after he was dead, because usually death either diminishes or extinguishes altogether hatred and envy. However, Julius Caesar had a companion in this situation (as he did in many things) in the person of his nephew and adopted son Caesar

Augustus, who was inferior to Julius Caesar in his military prowess but surely superior in his ability to rule. Cicero, likewise, at first praised Augustus immoderately, but then he began to criticize him strongly while still alive and even wrote fierce censures of him.¹ I am reluctant to speak thus of a man whom I esteem so much, but truth is stronger than admiration. I regret that it must be this way, but it is. And I do not doubt that if Cicero were present he would answer me easily with his overpowering eloquence, but the truth is not altered by mere words.

I think I shall never turn with a diseased mind from praise to vituperation. Now, as I return to my theme, this occurred to me at the very outset of my discussion with you: While true virtue does not reject merited glory, glory should follow it even if virtue is unwilling, just as the shadow follows the body. I said to myself: This man, you can easily see, prefers to be criticized rather than praised, and it is easier to acquire favor with him by finding fault than by giving him due praise. What, therefore, shall I do? What course shall I take? A man whom I do not hesitate to praise I would not fear to criticize if he would be as fine a subject for criticism as for praise. I confess that it is the condition of mortals that no one is entirely above reproach. A person who has a few small defects can be called perfect and very good. Therefore, give thanks to God who made you what you are, so that if your detractor and your praiser were of equal ability the praiser would naturally be more eloquent. This is like the case of the two farmers who are of equal ability and energy; the one who has the luck to own the more fertile land will appear to be the better farmer. Likewise, in the case of two ship captains equal in every other way, he will be the more fortunate who sails on more tranquil seas and is propelled by more favorable breezes.

But after I had decided to criticize you and selected this topic for my epistolary discussion, I had found nothing in you worthy of blame except for that one thing concerning which I had a private discussion with you some time ago. If in this matter you will be so kind as to pay heed to my humble and faithful advice, there is scarcely any doubt that you will soon derive healthy nourishment for mind and body and for the greatness of your

1. An allusion to the pseudo-Cicero *Epistola ad Octavium*.

present fame and future glory. So I will express it to you with the same words that Crastinus used with Caesar on the battlefield of Thessaly: "You will thank me either dead or alive."² I shall not speak of this any more. For what is the use of words to those who already understand and know? You know what I want, and I ought not to want, nor am I able to want, anything but your good. I do not doubt that you know this.

Since things are this way, I feel that I am relieved from telling at this point the long story that, as I have said, is not in the least pleasant for you and, in any case, is well known to everyone. I am referring to the fact that in the very flower of your young manhood you were deprived of your worthy and magnanimous father, by whose example and erudition you were able to learn everything that is noble and magnificent.³ At the time when it seemed especially fitting for you to have your own mentor, you took up the reins of government and, with the city of Padua under your control, overcame the difficulties created by your youth. You ruled with such competence and such maturity that no rumor, no hint of rebellion, disturbed the city in that time of great change. Next, after a short time, you transformed into a large surplus the enormous deficit that debts to foreign powers had left in your treasury. And now the years and experience in government have so matured you that you are esteemed as an outstanding lord, not only by your own citizens but also by the lords of many other cities, who hold you up as a model. As a result, I have often heard neighboring peoples express the wish that they could be governed by you and nurture envy for your subjects. You have never devoted yourself to either the arrogance of pompous display or to the idleness of pleasure, but you have devoted yourself to just rule so that everyone acknowledges that you are peaceful without being feckless and dignified without being prideful. As a result, modesty coexists with magnanimity in your character. You are thus full of dignity. Although, because of your incredible

2. Julius Caesar *Bellum civile* 3.91.3.

3. An allusion to the assassination in December 1350 in Padua of Francesco's father, Giacomo II da Carrara, by a distant kinsman. As a result Francesco, then a young man in his twenties, succeeded his popular father to the lordship of Padua.

humanity, you permit easy access to yourself even to the most humble, still one of your most outstanding acts is to have at the same time contracted for your daughters very advantageous marriages with noble families in distant lands.⁴ And you have been, above all other rulers, a lover of public order and peace—a peace that was never thought possible by the citizen-body when Padua was ruled by a communal regime or by any of your family, no matter how long they held the power—you alone constructed many strong fortresses at suitable points along the Paduan frontiers. Thus you acted in every way so that the citizens felt free and secure with you as a ruler, and no innocent blood was spilled. You also have pacified all your neighbors either by fear or by love or by admiration for your excellence, so that for many years now you have ruled a flourishing state with serene tranquility and in continual peace. But at last that adversary of the human race, that enemy of peace [the Devil], suddenly stirred up a dangerous war with that power you never feared. Consequently, although you still loved peace, you fought with Venice bravely and with great determination over a long time, even though you lacked the aid from allies that you had hoped for. And when it seemed most advantageous to do so, you skillfully concluded peace so that at one stroke you won twofold praise both for your bravery and your political wisdom.⁵ From these facts and from many others I shall omit, you have been viewed as vastly superior to all other rulers of your state and to all rulers of other cities, not only in the judgment of your own subjects but indeed in the opinion of the whole world as well.

But praising you in detail when the facts speak so clearly for themselves would be only a pleasant exercise, and it is a useless chore to try and criticize you. Besides, because of the lack of material my speech would end in unbecoming silence as soon as I

4. Francesco da Carrara contracted marriages for several of his daughters with the scions of noble houses in Italy and Germany, including the count of Oettingen, the count of Veglie, and the duke of Saxony.

5. An allusion to the border war fought with Venice in 1372–73, which Francesco da Carrara ended by agreeing to the payment of an indemnity to Venice while he maintained substantially his original frontiers. See Paolo Sambin, "La guerra del 1372–73 tra Venezia e Padova," *Archivio Veneto* 5th ser., 38–41 (1946–47):1–76.

began to talk. So I shall tell you what I have decided to speak about, a topic which I am sure is well known to you even without any further elaboration but which may be sometimes useful even to someone like yourself who has already been made aware of it. For even though the mind has grasped something well and learned it thoroughly and used that knowledge frequently, it can recall that thing when stimulated by another and, urged on by another's words, it follows more readily a path it would still take by itself. I shall discuss, therefore, something that almost everyone knows but that people often neglect, namely, what should be the character of a man to whom the task of governing a state has been entrusted. I am not unaware that such a subject could easily fill many volumes, and that I am content to write only one letter. Yet for some people a single word is more useful than a long speech is for others, and, moreover, the quality of the mind of the listener is much more important than the eloquence of the writer, whoever he may be. Indeed, let me repeat what I have often said: There must be within you a tiny spark that can be increased by fanning and will eventually burst into flame. Without this one will have only fanned dead ashes for no good purpose. I hope (or indeed I am certain) that in you there are not just faint embers but bright and burning coals or even an excellent flame of virtue and an able mind that is accustomed to utilize all it hears. I can recall how much one letter—a great one because it was the product of a great mind, namely the letter from Marcus Brutus to Marcus Tullius Cicero—stimulated you to excellence, so that for a long time you could scarcely speak of anything else.⁶ And I often used to say to myself about you: If he were not such a true friend of virtue he would never have been stimulated so strongly by such a brief, though admittedly excellent, piece of writing. Moreover, it has often been a great source of pleasure to me that I had procured this letter for you, and thus rescued from oblivion and neglect a letter that had been previously lost for a long time.

But before I begin to discuss this subject that I have just proposed, I wish to recall for you a passage from Cicero that, I suspect, is not unknown to you. Surely a man like yourself, who wants to be a good ruler, will listen eagerly to this passage as soon

6. An allusion to Cicero *Epistolae ad Brutum* 1.4a.

as you know that a good ruler is as dear to God as the state itself is dear to God. Here, therefore, is the passage from the sixth book of *On the Commonwealth*:

But, Africanus, be assured of this, so that you may be even more eager to defend the commonwealth: all these who have preserved, aided or enlarged their fatherland have a special place prepared for them in the heavens, where they may enjoy an eternal life of happiness. For nothing of all that is done on earth is more pleasing to that supreme god who rules the whole universe in justice, which is called the State. Their rulers and preservers come from heaven and to that place they return.⁷

Moreover, it is imagined that this conversation took place in Heaven. Who, therefore, could be so completely hardhearted, so opposed to excellence, and so contemptuous of true happiness that he would not seek out the task of governing and strive after such rewards? For although it is a pagan who speaks, yet his thought is not opposed to Christian truth or religious belief, even though our way of thinking and theirs are quite different when it comes to such doctrines as the creation of man and the soul.

But now at last I shall do what I have promised, and I shall discuss those things that the lord of a state ought to do. And I want you to look at yourself in this letter as though you were gazing in a mirror. If you see yourself in what I am describing (as no doubt you will quite often), enjoy it. And may you become every day more devoted and more faithful to God, who has bestowed upon us every good and perfect gift and virtue; and may you, albeit with enormous effort, overcome every difficulty and rise to that degree of holiness beyond which you cannot at the present moment ascend. On the other hand, if sometimes you feel that it is difficult for you to meet the standards I describe, I advise you to put your hands to your face and polish the countenance of your great reputation written there, so that you might become more

7. Cicero *Somnium Scipionis* 13 (= *De republica* 6.13), which was known in the fourteenth century only by its inclusion in Macrobius, *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis*.

attractive, and certainly more illustrious, as a result of this experience.

The first quality is that a lord should be friendly, never terrifying, to the good citizens, even though it is inevitable that he be terrifying to evil citizens if he is to be a friend to justice. "For he does not carry a sword without good cause, since he is a minister of God," as the Apostle says.⁸ Now nothing is more foolish, nothing is more destructive to the stability of the state, than to wish to be dreaded by everyone. Many princes, both in antiquity and in modern times, have wanted nothing more than to be feared and have believed that nothing is more useful than fear and cruelty in maintaining their power. Concerning this belief we have an example in the case of the barbaric emperor named Maximinus.⁹ In fact, nothing is farther from the truth than these opinions; rather, it is much more advantageous to be loved than to be feared, unless we are speaking of the way in which a devoted child fears a good father. Any other kind of fear is diametrically opposed to what a ruler should desire. Rulers in general want to reign for a long time and to lead their lives in security, but to be feared is opposed to both of these desires, and to be loved is consistent with both. Fear is opposed both to longevity in office and security in life; goodwill favors both, and this affirmation is supported by that opinion that one can hear from Cicero (or from the mouth of a Cicero who is speaking the truth). He says: "Of all things, none is better adapted to secure influence and hold it fast than is love, and nothing is more foreign to that end than is fear."¹⁰ And a little further on he states: "Fear is but a poor safeguard of lasting power, while affection, on the other hand, may be trusted to keep it safe forever."¹¹ Since you know well that this matter was important to Cicero, let me cite another passage: "To be a citizen dear to all, to deserve well of the State, to be praised, courted, loved is glorious; but to be feared and an object of hatred is invidious, detestable, and proof of weakness and corruption."¹²

Now it does not seem necessary to speak of security since there

8. Romans 13:4.

9. See *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 19.8.8.

10. Cicero *De officiis* 2.7.23.

11. Cicero *De officiis* 217.23.

12. Cicero *Orationes Philippicae* 1.14.23.

can be no one so stupid and ignorant of politics that he does not know that opinion is criticized by certain men affirming that security is always threatened and ultimately destroyed by fear. This fear is in subjects and not in the ruler, so that it is their security, not his, that is endangered. To which I answer with the famous words directed by Laberius, a Roman knight noted for his wisdom and learning, to Julius Caesar: "He who is feared by many must himself fear many in turn."¹³ That this opinion might be more convincing, let me reinforce it with another similar statement by Cicero, whom I have often named: "Furthermore, those who wish to be feared must inevitably be afraid of those whom they intimidate."¹⁴ He borrowed the essence of this idea, which we should not be ashamed to embrace, from Ennius: "Whom they fear, they hate. And whoever one hates, one hopes to see dead."¹⁵ And I add that whatever one wants, one desires to become. What strong passions urge many to accomplish can scarcely be forestalled.

Now, although the truth of the matter is as I have just sketched, there still are those who say: "They may hate me, provided they fear me." This was the speech that Euripides gave to that cruel tyrant Atreus.¹⁶ Daily did Caligula, who was certainly no more merciful than Atreus, say and practice this idea, which was beneficial neither to its creator nor to his followers.¹⁷ In this last category many people have wanted to place even Julius Caesar. This would certainly be strange if true; for although Julius Caesar did, to be sure, have an enormous appetite for empire and glory, I would say too enormous, still he did everything with mildness and mercy, with munificence and an incredible generosity, so that he would be loved rather than feared. For example, he kept nothing for himself from the booty won in his numerous victories and military commands, except for the very faculty to lavish gifts on others, and to this the most authoritative writers give witness. Indeed, Julius Caesar was so prone to be merciful to others that Cicero himself wrote that Caesar was accustomed to forget nothing except past

13. Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.7.4. The same anecdote was told earlier by Petrarch in his *Rerum memorandarum libri* 3.34.3–4 (ed. Gius. Billanovich, [Rome, 1943], p. 126).

14. Cicero *De officiis* 2.7.24.

15. Cicero *De officiis* 2.7.23.

16. Cicero *De officiis* 1.28.97; 3.21.82.

17. Suetonius *Caligula* 30.

injuries.¹⁸ It is indeed a splendid kind of revenge to pardon past wrongs; to forget them altogether is more splendid still. What is most amazing is that this quality was noted as Caesar's most noble trait by Cicero, who had as often viewed him as an enemy as seen him as a friend. Do you want more examples? I shall remain silent concerning Caesar's other excellent qualities, but I must say that he was endowed with many more virtues than anyone else, although they were not sufficiently acknowledged. Indeed, he was cut down by those very men upon whom he had heaped wealth and honors. On these men he had bestowed the privileges that came to him from his victories, and he had forgiven every one of his hostile acts and injuries. But neither his generosity nor his mercy aided Caesar in the end. So it was with good reason that at his funeral this verse of Pacuvius was sung:

That ever I, unhappy man, should save
Wretches, who thus have brought me to the grave.¹⁹

In this case it can be asked what were the causes that brought about this hatred, since the conspiracy against Caesar was surely not lacking in hatred. I myself can find no cause except a certain insolence and haughtiness of bearing that raised Caesar above the customs of his country because he enjoyed unwarranted honors and usurped extraordinary dignities.²⁰ Rome was not yet ready to endure the imperial pride that was so much increased by Caesar's successors, that compared to them Caesar seems to be the very soul of humility. If then even Julius Caesar was not protected by his power and wealth from the hatred of the many, it is an important question to ask in what ways are the love of one's subjects to be sought. Since hatred is the cause of ruin, so love is the cause of the contrary of ruin. The former casts one down, the latter protects a ruler.

What I can say is that the nature of public love is the same as private love. Seneca says: "I shall show you a love potion that is made without medicines, without herbs, without the incantations

18. Cicero *Pro Ligario* 12.35.

19. Suetonius *Divus Julius* 84, quoting Pacuvius.

20. See Suetonius *Divus Julius* 76.

of any poison-maker. If you want to be loved, love."²¹ There it is. Although many other things could be said, this saying is the summation of everything. What is the need for magical arts, what for any reward or labor? Love is free; it is sought out by love alone. And who can be found with such a steely heart that he would not want to return an honorable love? "Honorable" I say, for a dishonorable love is not love at all, but rather hatred hidden under the guise of love. Now to return love to someone who loves basely is to do nothing other than to compound one crime with another and to become a part of another person's disgraceful deceit. On this topic I shall, therefore, speak no more, but let us return to the theme of honorable love of others.

Indeed, from the discussion of this topic nothing but immense and honorable pleasure ought to come to you since you are so beloved by your subjects that you seem to them to be not a lord over citizens but the "father of your country." In fact this was the title of almost all of the emperors of antiquity; some of them bore the name justly, but others carried it so unjustly that nothing more perverse can be conceived. Both Caesar Augustus and Nero were called "father of his country." The first was a true father, the second was an enemy of both his country and of religion. But this title really does belong to you. There is no one among your citizens (that is, among those who really seek the peace and well-being of Padua) who looks upon you otherwise, who thinks of you as anything other than as a father. But you have to continue to strive so that you merit this dignity; it endures forever because of your noble efforts. I hope that, urged and encouraged, you will continue to rule as you already willingly have ruled for a long time. You should know, moreover, that to merit this kind of esteem you must always render justice and treat your citizens with goodwill. Do you really want to be a father to your citizens? Then you must want for your subjects what you want for your own children. I am not saying that you must love each of your subjects as much as you do one of your own children, but you should love each subject in the same way you do your child. For God, the supreme lawgiver, did not say: "Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself," but "as yourself."²² This means love sincerely,

21. Seneca *Epistulae* 9.6.

22. See Matt. 22:39.

without deceit, without seeking advantages or rewards, and in a spirit of pure love and freely-given goodwill. I am, moreover, of the opinion (without disputing the opinions of others) that you ought to love not each individual citizen but the whole citizen body at the same time, not so much as you love a child or a parent, but as you love yourself. Whereas in the case of individuals there are individual feelings for each one, in the case of the state all feelings are involved. Therefore, you ought to love your citizens as you do your children, or rather (if I may put it this way) as a member of your own body or as a part of your soul. For the state is one body and you are its heart. Moreover, this act is to be manifested by kind words, especially in righteous actions, and above all (as I was already saying) with justice and devotion to duty. For who could not love someone who has always pleasant, just, helpful, and always showed himself to be a friend? And if we add to these fine qualities the material benefits that good lords are accustomed to bestow on their subjects, then surely there develops an incredible fund of goodwill among the citizens that will serve as a firm and handsome foundation for a lasting government.

So put away arms, bodyguards, mercenaries, bugles, and trumpets, and use all these things only against the enemy because with your citizens your love is sufficient. As Cicero says: "The prince ought to be surrounded not with arms, but with the love and goodwill of his subjects."²³ And I reckon as citizens those who desire the preservation of the state and not those who are always trying to change things, for these should be thought of not as citizens but as rebels and public enemies. These considerations call to mind that well-known saying of Augustus: "Whoever does not wish to disturb the present state of the city is a good citizen and a good man."²⁴ Therefore, I have no doubt that whoever desires the opposite should be viewed as evil and not worthy to bear the name of citizen and enjoy the community of good men. In any case, in these matters your own nature has always guided you well, so that you have already gained both the citizens' love and goodwill. These qualities are, indeed, not just a path to glory, but even a road to salvation. As the good father said to his fine son Scipio Africanus: "Love justice and duty, which are very important in

23. Cicero *Orationes Philippicae* 2.44.112.

24. See Macrobius *Saturnalia* 2.4.18.

regard to parents and kinsmen, and most of all, to your native country. Such a life is the road to heaven."²⁵ What lover of heaven would not love the road by which he may ascend to Heaven?

Now there are innumerable examples of the fact that arms will not defend evil and unjust leaders from the wrath of their oppressed subjects. It will suffice to adduce here only the most interesting and notorious instances. What use to Caligula were his German bodyguards even though they hastened to his defense?²⁶ In extreme danger, Nero was informed that the soldiers had deserted their posts and his guards had fled.²⁷ But no cohorts of soldiers were necessary for Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus. Consider the death of Augustus: at his death bed you do not find armed bodyguards but rather friendly subjects, and, in conversation with friends amidst the embraces of his beloved wife, Augustus did not expire and die but rather was almost lulled to sleep.²⁸ Afterwards his remains were laid to rest with more honors than owed a human being, and his memory was cherished. Vespasian, who believed that it was not proper for an emperor to die standing up, expired held off the floor in the hands of his many friends.²⁹ Afterwards his son Titus met a premature but peaceful death with innumerable expressions of gratitude. As a result, Titus's death was viewed (as Suetonius says) as more of a tragedy for mankind than for himself.³⁰ Indeed, unless I am mistaken, all those princes who pass their lives in governing a state ought to consider and remember the following: the death of good princes is for them tranquil and happy while it is terrifying and dangerous for their subjects. For evil princes precisely the opposite is true. In that same city of Rome, where (as I have just mentioned) many emperors have died in complete peace and contentment and have had their names recalled by everyone with honor and admiration—in that city Domitian, the brother of Titus, was killed, and the Senate itself applauded his demise, besmirching his reputation (as I have seen written) with bitter denunciations and calumnies.³¹

25. Cicero *Somnium Scipionis* 16 (= *De republica* 6.16).

26. Suetonius *Caligula* 58.

27. Suetonius *Nero* 47.

28. See Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 99–100.

29. Suetonius *Vespasianus* 24.

30. Suetonius *Titus* 10–11.

31. Suetonius *Domitian* 23.

Further, the Senate decreed that his statues be taken down and destroyed, that his name be cancelled from inscriptions, and that the very memory of him be obliterated. Likewise, Galba's very head was detached, stuck on a spear, and carried about by camp followers and servant boys through the encampments hostile to him to the jeers and horror of all.³² Vitellius was cut down with many blows on the Scala Gemonia in the Forum and hacked into many pieces. Finally, his remains were dragged around on a hook and thrown into the Tiber.³³

I shall pass over examples of many others who met their end in horrible ways. But does not this vast difference in manner of death surely follow from a vast difference in manner of living? For this reason that very wise emperor Marcus Aurelius, who joined to the difficult task of governing an empire the name and learning of a philosopher, after he had discussed the fall of many emperors who preceded him, concluded by saying that each emperor met the death that was consistent with his manner of life. He predicted that he himself would be among those who died peacefully.³⁴ Indeed, his prediction came true. Now since this was the opinion of a great and wise personage, and since every wise man agrees that one should live as decently and well as possible in order to gain—besides the many other benefits from leading a good life—the additional benefit of dying well. Surely it is not too great a task to spend all the preceding years well for a worthy final hour, although, according to the best opinion, this passage into eternity requires only a moment. And we should not wonder at this. Nor should we be surprised since we enter an immense city through a narrow gate, and we penetrate the vast reaches of the sea in a tiny ship. Likewise, through that brief passage of death we enter into an eternity, and just as the soul is when death takes it, so it endures for all time.

Now I shall speak of justice, the very important and noble function that is to give to each person his due so that no one is punished without good reason. Even when there is a good reason for punishment you should incline to mercy, following the example

32. Suetonius *Galba* 20.

33. Suetonius *Vitellius* 17.

34. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* 4.8.3.

of Our Heavenly Judge and Eternal King. For no one of us is immune from sin and all of us are weak by our very nature, so there is no one of us who does not need mercy. Hence, one who wishes to be just must also be merciful. Therefore, although mercy and justice seem, at first glance, to be opposites, they are in fact inseparably linked. Indeed, it is as St. Ambrose says so perceptively in his book *On the Death of the Emperor Theodosius*: "Justice is nothing other than mercy, and mercy is the same as justice."³⁵ Thus, the two qualities are not merely linked; they are one. Now this is not to say that you should let go scot-free murderers, traitors, poisoners, and other such miscreants, so that by being merciful to a few criminals you are actually harming the vast majority of your subjects. What I am suggesting is that you ought to be merciful to those who have gone astray a little and who have lapsed momentarily if it can be done without encouraging their example. But otherwise remember that too much mercy and indiscriminate leniency can lead to a greater cruelty.

Now, after justice, the best way to earn the affection of your citizenry is generosity. Even if the head of a state cannot benefit individual subjects, he may at least benefit the entire population. There is hardly anyone who esteems someone from whom he does not expect either private or public benefaction. Of course, I am speaking of that esteem in which princes are held; among friends and equals there is a different kind of love, which is sufficient in itself, neither asking for favors nor expecting them. In the sphere of public beneficence there is the restoration of temples and public buildings for which Caesar Augustus, above all others, is to be praised. Livy named him rightly "the builder and restorer of all temples."³⁶ Similarly, Suetonius says: "He boasted, not without cause, that he found a city of brick and left one of marble."³⁷ Just as important is the construction of the walls of the city, which gave fame to the name of Aurelian, otherwise a cruel and bloody emperor. In the less than six years during which he ruled, this emperor enlarged the walls of the city of Rome to their present dimensions. As a result, the historian Flavius Vopiscus, following,

35. St. Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii imperatoris* 26 (= PL 16:1456).

36. Livy *Ab urbe condita* 4.20.

37. Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 28.

I believe, the system of measures of antiquity, was prompted to say: "The circumference of the walls was now nearly fifty miles."³⁸ But you, sir, have been relieved of the task of wall-building thanks to the great industry of your forebears. In fact, I do not know a city in all of Italy, or even all of Europe, that is ringed with walls more handsome than Padua's.

But the ancients were, I believe, as much concerned with the construction of highways as with the erection of walls. While walls give safety in time of war, roads are a very useful addition in peacetime. The chief difference between the two is this: walls last for a long time because of their great size, whereas roads are soon destroyed because of the continual traffic in men and horses and, above all, the traffic in those heavy Tartarean carts, which I strongly wish that Erichthonius had never invented.³⁹ These carts not only damage the streets, the foundation of buildings, and the peace of those living in them, but they also disturb the thoughts of those wanting to meditate on the good. Therefore, I ask you to turn your attention to the streets of Padua, which have for a long time been neglected and broken up and which, with their silent deformity, call out for your assistance. I think that you will want to tackle this difficult task, not just because you are responsible for the city and its inhabitants. I know that the beauty of Padua and the well-being of its citizens ought to be—as they are—close to your heart, but the repair of the streets is in your own interest as well. For I have never known anyone—and I am not only speaking here of princes but of every sort of men—except perhaps your own dear father, who liked to ride on horseback, as you do, into every part of his country for such long stretches of time. I am not criticizing this habit of yours since your first duty and care is clearly the good government of Padua, and the presence of a good prince is always pleasing to faithful citizens; but you ought to take care that what you do so eagerly you also do safely. Hence you should remove all danger and difficulties from this horseback-riding and turn it into an agreeable and pleasant recreation.

Entrust, therefore, the repair of Padua's streets to some good

38. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 26.39.2.

39. An allusion to Erichthonius, the son of Vulcan, king of Athens, who is credited with being the first man to hitch four horses to a chariot; see Vergil *Georgica* 3.113ff.

man who is dedicated to your own welfare and that of the city. And don't be afraid that by appointing a well-known and noble man to this seemingly vile job you are inflicting harm on him. To an honest and upright citizen no duty that results in benefit to his country can ever seem base. History provides an example of this truth. There was in Thebes a very brave and learned man named Epaminondas, who was—if we count virtue alone and not just good luck, which often raises up the unworthy—the leading man, or at least one of the leading men, of Greece. Now this man, about whom it has been written truly that with him the glory of Thebes was born and with him it died, was opposed by his fellow citizens—such evils often occur in democratic states—who appointed him to the job of street cleaner, which was in Thebes regarded as the dirtiest job of all.⁴⁰ The citizens hoped thereby that they would diminish the glory and good reputation attached to this man. But Epaminondas did not respond to this punishment with force, or even with a harsh word. Rather, he readily accepted the task assigned to him and said: "I shall undertake this task not with the idea that an indignity has been visited upon me as a result of this job, but rather that it has brought me dignity so that in my hands something very noble will be created out of a task that has always been viewed as base and ignoble." And soon, indeed, the job gained such a good reputation under his splendid administration that a task which has previously been despised, even by the lowliest of the plebs, now became a post sought after even by the most illustrious citizens.⁴¹ Now I hope you will entrust this same task to some industrious and honest citizen of Padua and that you soon will see that many compete for this job, and thus, aided by the zeal of the citizens, the old homeland will be made good as new.

Now I am going to write concerning a matter that seems almost ridiculous and that I have already discussed with you one day recently when you came to visit me in my study at Arquà, an honor that you have paid me often, even though I am unworthy of such

40. See Justinus *Epitome historiae Philippicae* 6.8.9.33; Cicero *Tusculanae disputationes* 1.2.4; and Valerius Maximus *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX* 3.7. ext. 5. Petrarch used the same sources in a discussion of Epaminondas in his *Rerum memorandarum libri* 1.7 (Billanovich, pp. 6–7).

41. See Valerius Maximus 3.7. ext. 5.

visits. Moreover, the very subject of the discussion stood before your very eyes. Indeed, Padua is a fine city on account of the noble lineage of its leading families, the fertility of its site, and its ancient origins that go back many centuries before the founding of Rome itself. Moreover, Padua is furnished with a good university, fine clergy and outstanding religious celebrities, and truly impressive shrines, including the churches of the bishop Prosdocimo, the friar Anthony, and the virgin martyr Justina. What I think is not insignificant—nor should you—I add immediately: that the city has you as lord and protector. Finally it is celebrated in some verses by Vergil.⁴² This city, I say, so outstanding in its many glories, is being transformed—with you looking on and not stopping it, as you easily could—into a horrid and ugly pasture by rampaging herds of pigs! Everywhere one turns one can hear their ugly grunts and see them digging with their snouts. A filthy spectacle, a sad noise! These are evils that we have already borne for a long time, and those who came to Padua are amazed and scandalized by them. This state of affairs is repulsive to all who meet it and even worse for those who come on horseback, for whom the free-roaming pigs are always a nuisance and sometimes even a danger because an encounter with these stinking and intractable animals will frighten a horse and even throw its rider. Now I recall that the last time I spoke with you concerning this matter you said that there was an ancient statute that carried with it a heavy penalty that anyone could seize the pigs found roaming freely in the streets.⁴³ But who does not know that, just as men grow old, so do all human creations? Even the Roman laws fell into disuse and, if it were not for the fact that they have been studied assiduously in the schools, they would now be quite forgotten. So what do you think is the fate of municipal statutes? So that this old law may be applied again, let us have it drawn up again and announced publicly by the town crier with the same, or even a heavier, fine attached to it. Then send out some officials who will remove the wandering pigs so that these urban herders will discover at their own expense that they cannot flout what the law forbids anyone to do. Let those who own pigs keep them on a farm and those

42. Cf. Vergil *Aeneid* 1.241ff.

43. On this statute, see the essay by G. Tamassia, "Francesco Petrarca e gli statuti di Padova," *Atti della R. Accademia di Padova*, n.s. 13 (1896-97):201ff.

who don't have a farm keep their pigs shut up inside their houses. Those who don't even own a house should still not be allowed to spoil the homes of other citizens and the beauty of Padua. Nor should these pig owners think that at will, without hindrance from law, they can convert the famous city of Padua into a pigsty! Now some might think this is a frivolous matter, but I don't think it is either frivolous or unimportant. On the contrary, the task of restoring Padua to its former noble majesty consists not so much in large projects as in small details. Partly, of course, these latter concern the task of governing the city, but you must also pay attention to the decorum of the city so that the eyes have their share of the common joy, the citizens are proud of and revel in the improved aspect of the city, and strangers feel that they are not entering a mere village but a real city. This is what you can do for Padua, and if you do it, I think you will have done something worthy of yourself. But concerning this subject I have already said more than enough.

From this issue there arises still another matter; after you have repaired the streets both within the city and leading away from Padua, I hope that you will undertake with every effort the draining of the marshes and bogs which lie near the city. In this way you will be able to improve the already beautiful countryside surrounding the city and to restore to their true worth the farms of the famous Euganean Hills, pitted with bogs that are already rich in the fruits of Minerva and Bacchus, so that the cultivation of the grains of Ceres, prevented now because of the foul, boggy ponds, can be restored.⁴⁴ With this project you will be able to combine utility with beauty, and thus, with a single act, you will gain multiple praise. Undertake this project, I beg you, and you will gain that kind of glory which all your forebears never enjoyed because they did not think of such projects or were afraid to undertake them. Good God will assist you in this noble undertaking. Nature will help you too, because almost all the bogs are situated in the higher altitudes, making it a very easy matter to drain the swamps by letting the water flow to lower ground, into

44. An allusion to the cultivation in the Euganean Hills of the grape (the product of Bacchus) and of the liberal arts (represented by Minerva), and emphasizing the lack of cultivation of cereals, such as wheat, barley, or oats (the products of Ceres).

the nearby rivers, and thence into the sea. As a result, the present generation will enjoy more fertile fields, a more handsome countryside, a healthier and more pleasing climate. And future generations will, because of this one project, always remember your name.

Although I have often been irritated when those who love laziness and leisure say that such a project would be impossible, I know from my own common sense, and from the judgment of the inhabitants of the Euganean Hills, that such an undertaking is not only possible but even very easy. So put your hand to this task, my generous lord; if you willingly undertake this project, then surely a happy outcome will result. And you should not consider this sort of project unworthy of your dignity for none other than Julius Caesar took pride in such tasks. Concerning this point, Suetonius writes that a little before he died Caesar planned to drain the Pontine Marshes and to dig a canal across the isthmus on which Corinth is situated so that seaborne trade to the north and east could be expedited.⁴⁵ I would wish that you were in a position to undertake similar monumental projects. But the marshes I'm talking about are not far away, as are the Pontine Marshes; they are nearby, right under your very eyes. So give the orders to clean and drain these fetid marshes while your health and strength are good and age not too far advanced. Now I don't want to laugh, but lest you think I am prepared to offer nothing but words toward the completion of this project, I intend to offer you my little purse for part of the expenses, even though I am not a citizen of Padua. What should a lord contribute? What ought we to expect of a private person? If perhaps one wants to know exactly what I will contribute, the answer will be known in due time. For now I will give you the same answer that the freedman gave once to Augustus: "On my part, I will give to you, lord, what seems to you proper to my new status."⁴⁶ But as to the repair of the streets, which I mentioned earlier, you ought to do this before other projects since that project is fairly easy and clearly more honorable. I have heard that at one time public funds were appropriated for such projects so that these tasks could be completed without any

45. Suetonius *Divus Julius* 44.

46. Macrobius *Saturnalia* 2.4.24. The same anecdote is told by Petrarch in *Rerum memorandarum libri* 2.71 (Billanovich, p. 93).

additional taxes on the citizen-body and without reducing the communal treasury or your own private wealth.

Indeed, I do not deny, nor am I ignorant of, the fact that the lord of a city ought to take every precaution to avoid useless and superfluous expenditures. In this way he will not exhaust the treasury and have nothing left for necessary expenditures. Therefore, a lord should spend nothing and do nothing whatsoever that does not further the beauty and good order of the city over which he rules. To put it briefly, he ought to act as a careful guardian of the state, not as its lord. Such was the advice that the Philosopher gave at great length in his *Politics*, advice that is found to be very useful and clearly consistent with justice.⁴⁷ Rulers who act otherwise are to be judged as thieves rather than as defenders and preservers of the state. One should always remember that saying of the Emperor Hadrian, who was speaking I know not whether more as a prince or a citizen. In either case, Elius Spartianus wrote concerning him: "He discussed policy frequently both in the Assembly and in the Senate. Thus he seemed to run the government of Rome as though he knew that it was not part of his own private property but belonged to the people."⁴⁸ Thus, I repeat, he did everything so that he could render account of his spending to anyone, and it is clear that he had to give account, if not to men, at least to God. Similarly, it was very proper that on his deathbed Augustus rendered account of his rule to the Senate.⁴⁹ Likewise, whoever has led a good and honorable life—no matter what is his social station—or has acted in such a way that he weighed every possibility and, even if answerable to no one, he could still give full and honest account of his actions to anyone. In this action consists the definition of duty (as Cicero gives it): "Duty is the thing that one cannot neglect without neglecting virtue itself."⁵⁰ Why is it important that you have no one to whom to account since your soul must answer to itself and its conscience, which, if dissatisfied, leaves you sad and unhappy? Granted, he was not one of the best

47. Aristotle *Politica* 5.9. 1314b40ff, which Petrarch knew only in medieval Latin translation.

48. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 1.8.3.

49. Suetonis *Divus Augustus* 28.

50. Cicero *De officiis* 1.29.101.

of princes, but the promise of Tiberius given in the Senate, full of generous trust, deservedly was praised as excellent: "I will see to it that you will always have an accounting of my actions and words."⁵¹ Thus he did more than we asked for, for he gave not just an accounting of his actions but of the words. Concerning the moderation that rulers ought to display in their programs of public works, we may consider the example of the Emperor Vespasian. Although that emperor undertook very generously to make certain public improvements, still, when a workman wanted to transport some very large columns to the Capitoline at little cost, Vespasian thanked the man for the fair offer but would not allow the work to be done. He said: "Let me provide bread instead to my poor plebs."⁵² Such is the righteous and laudable preoccupation of a good prince: to reduce the hunger of the plebs with every effort and to procure for his subjects plentiful foodstuffs and make happiness their honest companion. In this context that saying of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius is very appropriate: "When stuffed with food, no people are happier than the Romans."⁵³ This opinion can be applied to all nations: a people are always driven to despair more from a lack of foodstuffs than from a deficiency in moral qualities. Thus, the happiness of every nation consists more in the well-being of the body than of the spirit.

From these concerns, however, derives not just the happiness of the people, but the security of the ruling class as well. For no one is more terrifying than a starving commoner of whom it has been said: "the hungry pleb knows no fear."⁵⁴ Indeed, there are not just ancient examples but contemporary ones, especially from recent events in the city of Rome, which bear out this saying.⁵⁵ In this matter the prudence of Julius Caesar is especially to be praised. During both his Gallic and German wars he was always very intent on providing foodstuffs, and so, returning to Rome, was quick to send ships to seek grain from fertile islands for the precise

51. Suetonius *Tiberius* 28.

52. Suetonius *Vespasianus* 18.

53. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 26.47.4.

54. Lucan *De bello civili* 3.58.

55. An allusion to a revolt—caused by famine—by the lower classes of Rome against the senatorial families in 1353, just before the return to the city of the demagogic Cola di Rienzo. See F. Gregorovius, *History of the City of Rome in the Middle Ages*, trans. A. Hamilton, 8 vols. (London, 1898), 6:337ff.

purpose of meeting the needs of the Roman people. No less concerned was Caesar Augustus, of whom it is written that when grain was in short supply he used to distribute it at a very low price and sometimes gave it virtually free to the Roman people, one by one.⁵⁶ For this sort of policy a prince is really worthy of praise, for this policy is motivated by a true love of country and a desire to gain adulation so that the people will bear their taxes more happily, suffer more willingly, and bear hardships more readily. Such a love Augustus showed clearly when he alleviated the hunger of the Roman people (as I have said) by selling grain at a very low price or dispensing it free. But the same Augustus silenced complaints over the scarcity of wine with a stinging and somber reply, making it apparent that he had not provided the grain out of a desire to curry favor with the people but to provide for the well-being and health of his subjects. For he told them that for the needs of thirsty men the city of Rome had plenty of aqueducts, which had just been built by his brother-in-law Marcus Agrippa, and that, moreover, there was always the Tiber flowing past the city walls.⁵⁷ There is, to tell the truth, a vast difference between grain and wine: the former is certainly a necessity of life, while the latter is often harmful to it. Of course, wine is more pleasant than bread to the people who often seek what gives pleasure more than what is good for them. But, indeed, the good and prudent prince does not pay heed so much to what is pleasureful as to what is beneficial.

Now this concern over the grain supply is so much a part of a prince's duty that even evil and feckless leaders cannot avoid it altogether. Hence, good princes ought to be especially diligent in seeing that grain is provided. It is true that from such preoccupations you have been released by God and by nature since the regions over which you rule are so fertile that you are far more accustomed to selling a surplus of grain from your district to others than to importing grain. Nonetheless, I would advise you that even in time of good harvests you should prepare yourself for scarcity, so that you may predict by cautious consideration not what is available now but what the future may hold, thus protecting yourself and your state from unexpected changes of fortune.

Until now I don't know whether I have spoken too much or too

56. Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 41.

57. Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 42.

little concerning those things that a prince ought to do. Surely that indulgence in banquets and circus games and the exhibiting of wild and exotic animals is useless; these things may provide a brief delight and momentary pleasure to the eyes, but indeed they hold nothing honorable or worthy for the eyes of a good prince. Hence, I would recommend that a good prince avoid these things even though they are adjudged pleasing by the insane and vulgar mob. In this instance I cannot bring myself to admire the policy of the ancient Roman leaders who, even though they recognized the vanity of these things, staged these vulgar games in order to curry favor with the people, and thus depleted the treasury and diverted the money for other than intended uses. But if I were to speak of leaders who had lapsed in their own time into these sorts of errors and narrated the flights of madness of each one, my discussion would surely soon become disorganized and not at all germane to my topic. Therefore, I return at once to the main subject.

Now when a ruler has decreed that his people are to be burdened with some new tax, which he will never want to do unless in times of public need, he should make all understand that he is struggling with necessity and does it against his will. In short, he should argue that, except for the fact that events compelled him to levy the tax, he would gladly have done without it. It will also redound to his good reputation if he will have contributed some of his own money to the new tax. Thus he will show that he, the head of the people, is but one among them, and at the same time he will demonstrate his great moderation. This is exactly what the Roman Senate did during the Second Punic War, following the advice of the consul Valerius Laevinus, and this act has been remembered with great admiration by many generations.⁵⁸ However high it is, the exaction will always be judged lighter and milder. Although it was not spoken by a good prince, yet let us not forget the excellent advice he is said to have written to provincial officials who recommended burdening the provinces with new taxes: "Good shepherds ought to shear their sheep but not skin them."⁵⁹ And if such a saying applied to Roman provinces,

58. See Livy *Ab urbe condita* 26.34.

59. Suetonius *Tiberius* 32.

should it not also apply to one's homeland? Because I wish you to be compared only with the best and most outstanding of princes, I beg you to imitate this policy and follow the example of those just words and deeds which have merited great praise. When your tax collectors, therefore, offer you hope of large profits, follow the example of Antoninus Pius, of whom it is written that he was never pleased by any income gained at the expense of his provincial subjects.⁶⁰ How much less should you want to cause any harm to your own subjects? Similarly, Constantius uttered a laudable sentiment: "I would rather have the public wealth distributed among my subjects than closed up in my treasury."⁶¹ Now his policy has two rationales. First of all, it is better for riches to be held and enjoyed by many than by one person, and, second, it is more useful for private citizens to earn money from their own industry. What is a treasury but an inert and useless mass of metal heaped up on account of greed? Who cannot see that the wealth of the citizens is also the wealth of the prince? And it is *vice versa*, as Lucan writes: "The poverty of a servant is harmful, not to the servant, but to the master."⁶²

And there are other even easier ways of gaining your subjects' affections—ways that are, I admit, difficult for a haughty prince, but in those cases where the prince's temperament tends toward humane behavior these methods are easy and pleasant. For instance, you have a tale that is told as follows: "Hadrian liked to visit twice or three times a day the sick, now of the equestrian order, now of the class of freedmen. These he revived with consolation, and he raised up their spirits with encouraging words. He always invited some of them to dine at his own table."⁶³ Now who can there be with such a terrible disposition that he would not be moved by such solicitous acts by his lord? And no one is more well endowed with these qualities than you are. Hence, all you have to do is to follow your own good instincts and everything you want will come to you. So be compassionate to those who are suffering from sickness or some other misadventure, and, if you

60. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 3.6.1.

61. *Eutropius Breviarium ab urbe condita* 10.1.

62. *Lucan De bello civili* 3.152.

63. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 1.9.7.

can, you ought to give them some help. But I do not doubt that you already act in this way. For who except a barbarian would remain unmoved when exhorted to help those whom he loves.

Furthermore, just as the love of the people is gained more easily by mercy and generosity than by any other quality, so, conversely, nothing is more guaranteed to provoke a people's hatred than cruelty and greed. If you compare the two evils you will see that while cruelty is harsher, greed is much more common. Cruelty is harsher but it only afflicts a few people, while greed is not so harsh but it affects everyone. Innumerable tyrants and princes have been undone by these two vices and made themselves hated and maligned through the centuries. But it is not necessary to speak with you concerning the vice of cruelty at any length because you are not merely a stranger to it but positively opposed to practicing it. Thus I would judge that nothing would be more difficult than for a merciful person such as yourself to commit, or even to consider committing, a cruel act against someone else. Cruelty is the quality of an ignoble, capricious, and treacherous person—someone quite different from yourself—a person quick to wreak vengeance when the possibility is offered. This vice is foreign to human nature and especially alien to the dignity of a prince, whose power to mete out vengeance is sufficient revenge. For this reason that short saying of Hadrian has been admired for a long time. Speaking to one who had been his mortal enemy when he was a private citizen and who now, seeing Hadrian emperor, was justly afraid and awaited all kinds of punishment, Hadrian said with a placid brow: "You have escaped."⁶⁴ But no more about this need be said, except that it seems to me that humanity is the high expression of human nature. Without this a person is not only not good but, indeed, cannot even be called a man.

It is more difficult, however, to banish greed completely from one's character. What person is there who does not lust after something? But I beg and beseech you that since, by God's grace, you have the means of leading a magnificent style of life, you will always hold a lustful appetite in check. Greed is insatiable, inexhaustable, and infinite, and whoever is governed by greed loses his own property while he desires that of another. Do you, perhaps,

wonder at this opinion? This much is certain: whoever desires something very much and does not get it often forgets what he already has. Thus inattentive persons lose their way, and, intent on riches, they do not perceive immediate dangers; indeed, I don't think a mortal life can suffer an evil greater than this one. You ought not say to yourself what so many others do: "I am all right for the moment, but what is going to become of me later on?" Isn't this worrying about what is going to happen many years hence rather silly when no one knows what the next hour may bring? Leave aside these useless preoccupations, for it is written: "Abandon yourself to the care of the Lord and He will nourish you, and He will never let the righteous be shaken."⁶⁵ Why do you waver? Why do you fear? Why do you worry? Don't you know that the Lord cares for you? You have a good shepherd; He will never fail you, He will never desert you. Again, it is written: "Reveal your needs and go to the Lord and place your trust in Him, and He will care for you."⁶⁶ Now some may say that this is good advice for monks but not for princes. Such a critic does not understand, however, that princes ought to adhere to God and love and put their trust in Him because they have received more great benefits from Him. It is a kind of ingratitude to expect only a little from Him who has given you so much. God is the one who has nurtured you from infancy and who will care for you until the last. God will never abandon hope in you whom He did not abandon even when you could not hope in Him; indeed, even while you were growing larger in your mother's womb.

Once you have overcome this difficult evil of greed, I shall show you another sort of greed that is generous and above reproach; you must lust after the treasure of virtue and win the fame of outstanding glory. This is a property that moths and rust cannot corrupt, nor can thieves steal it in the night.⁶⁷ Now, except in the case of war (as has recently happened to you)⁶⁸ or in the event of some unavoidable difficulty, you should avoid anyone who wants his lord to take over property at the expense of others. Indeed, such

65. Ps. 54:22 (Vulgate numbering).

66. Ps. 36:5–6 (Vulgate numbering).

67. An echo from Luke 12:33.

68. Another allusion to the border war fought against Venice in 1372–73.
See n. 4 above.

urgings are the practice of almost all courtiers. Hence, you should view persons who advise such a policy as the enemies of your good reputation and mortal soul. Such evil courtiers arouse their lords so that as they steal and pillage the property of others, thus earning the hatred of their subjects and this iniquitous kind of men so oppresses the people and deceives their lords that they bring to ruin both their lords and themselves. Concerning such matters, there is that true and famous saying of Marius Maximus—as Elius Lampridius records it in his history of the Emperor Alexander—and these are his very words: “The state in which the ruler is evil is happier and almost more secure than the one in which he has evil friends; for, indeed, one evil man can be made better by many righteous men, but in no way can many evil men be held in check by one man, however righteous he may be.”⁶⁹ Hence, this Alexander was a good prince, for, besides his own innate virtues of character, he also had, as the same historian writes, friends “who were upright and respected, never spiteful, or thieving, or seditious, or cunning, or leagued together for evil, or hateful to the righteous, or lustful, or cruel, or deceivers of their prince, or mockers, or desirous of hoodwinking him like a fool. But, on the contrary, they were upright, revered, temperate, pious, fond of their prince, men who neither mocked him themselves nor wished him to become an object of mockery by others, who sold nothing, who lied in no matter, who falsified nothing, and who never tricked their lord so that he might love them.”⁷⁰ So, according to this author, such are the friends whom a prince ought to want and seek out. The other type ought to be avoided like the plague by the prince and to be excluded from his circle as though they were public enemies. These courtiers are the masters of evil arts who have never known and always hated good morals. Moreover, these men are eager to teach the greedy ways they so like to their own princes, so that if the princes are persuaded to follow their evil ways, they can be transformed into the worst of men. For if greed is an evil in the private citizen, how much worse is it in princes.

Just as a prince has such a capacity for harming, and just as contempt for base things is a very fine quality in a prince, so a prince’s greed and desire for treasure and riches is very ugly. Not

69. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 18.65.4.

70. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 18.66.2.

without good reason, that very wise emperor Marcus Aurelius (whom I have had occasion to mention earlier) used to say: "In an emperor avarice is the most grievous of all evils."⁷¹ For this failing alone did Pertinax and Galba suffer on account of their cruelty. Therefore, all those who love virtue and wish to have a good reputation should avoid and despise the evil of greed. But, most of all, princes should avoid greed because they are the leaders of men and in their care has been placed vast sums and much property as well as the state itself. And if they will administer their governments properly, they are certain to consider wealth foul corruption and obtain the treasures that are most prized, namely, an easy and clear conscience and the love of God and of their fellow men. Those who follow their own desires will only come to ruin, for they will never satisfy their insatiable desires and they will surely earn the hatred of God and of men. Both the consensus of the wise and experience itself—that infallible mistress of truth—teach that greed for wealth is never extinguished but only grows stronger. Concerning this question the best advice was given by Epicurus, who said that to become rich one did not need to increase his property but rather to curb his own desires.⁷² Hence it is obvious that those things that are called riches are not really riches, for if they were, they would really make one rich, but they do not. In fact, all the treasure under the sun will not make one rich. Rather, consider the brief and modest axiom that in abandoning greed we approach nature more closely.

Indeed, there are many ways of acquiring money (as Aristotle points out in the *Economics*),⁷³ and to these the courtiers of the princes of our own age have added innumerable other methods. Consequently, the Philosopher now seems to have been quite unlearned in these matters. But these talents ought to be despised and condemned by a good prince, just as he ought to hate anything instituted for mere expediency to the detriment of justice. Rather, he ought to keep in mind that precept of the most learned and wisest of men: Nothing can be useful that is not at the same time just and honorable.⁷⁴ In the case of some courtiers, when they are

71. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 6.8.2.

72. Cf. Seneca *Epistolae* 21.7ff.

73. See Aristotle *Economica* 2. 1345b5–1353b41.

74. Cf. Cicero *De officiis* 3.3.11.

good no one could be better (but this is very rare), and when they are bad nothing could be worse (and this is often the case); on this subject you have had my final thoughts. No, not really my thoughts but those of the emperor Diocletian, for although Diocletian was very harsh in his persecutions of the practitioners of Christianity, still he may be considered among the outstanding emperors. Here are his words, written down, unless I am mistaken, as they appear in a book on the life of the emperor Aurelius: "Four or five men gather together and devise a plan for deceiving the emperor, and so they tell him to what policies he ought to give his approval. Now the emperor, who is shut up in his palace, cannot know the truth. He is forced to believe only what these men tell him. He appoints as judges men who ought never to be appointed to that office and he removes from public office precisely those officials whom he ought to retain." What more can be said? As Diocletian himself was wont to say: "The favor of even a good and wise and righteous emperor is often sold."⁷⁵ When for these and other reasons he was finally persuaded to step down from the throne, he concluded: "There is nothing more difficult than to rule well."⁷⁶ And indeed it is so. Princes should not think that they can enjoy both happiness and ease in governing; perhaps they will find happiness, but I don't think that it will happen very often. If you don't believe me, just ask some prince who has had a great deal of experience in governing.

From this question I proceed to a topic concerning which I cannot warn or advise you enough, namely, never act in such a way so as to give control of the state to one of your courtiers and thus give Padua a lord other than yourself. History has seen many instances of princes who wanted to exalt their followers but who actually debased themselves and became contemptible and despised in the eyes of their subjects and ultimately were jeered at and reduced to poverty by the very men they had promoted. Because of such a disaster the emperor Claudius, who preceded Nero, was regraded as vile. He accorded many favors to his worthless freedmen, Posides, Felix, Narcissus, and Pallas, and gave them control over the provinces so that they despoiled the Empire and Claudius himself. At last he was reduced to begging from his former ser-

75. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 26.43.3.

76. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 26.43.2.

vants, now affluent. "Dependent on these men and their wives," Suetonius says, "Claudius acted more like a vile slave than an emperor."⁷⁷ Guided and compelled by such men, he acted very stupidly and very cruelly. The same mistake was made by the emperor Heliogabalus, who, to the grief of all good men, let those around him have great power and put everything up for sale, while dishonest friends made the emperor, as Lampridius says, "even more of a fool than he was naturally."⁷⁸ And Didius Julianus merits the same condemnation because he gave the power to rule to precisely those men whom he ought to have kept under his own authority.⁷⁹ Of course, there are always stupid and mediocre princes under whom such a state of affairs has to be tolerated. I know, however, that there is nothing mediocre about you, nothing that is not singular and outstanding. Indeed, you will not fulfill my hopes or those of many others unless you at least reach or even surpass the achievement of many good and outstanding rulers. And if you fail to achieve this I will not attribute it to a lack of natural ability but to the failure of your will.

But why should we talk only about lesser emperors when we can cite the example of such an outstanding man as the Emperor Marcus Aurelius over whom mere freedmen exercised a great deal of control?⁸⁰ Because of this sort of example, it is proper to warn fervently anyone like yourself, who proposes to excel and govern, that you should watch diligently and not permit yourself (as many outstanding princes have) to fall into this vice using the benevolent disposition (which you possess) as an excuse. Although it is well to imitate illustrious men, you should not follow their example in every particular. There is no one who does not occasionally make a mistake and thus fall short of his potential for excellence.

But you will say, and perhaps you have already said to yourself, that I am advising you to be ungrateful to your courtiers. If I did that, how then would I be allowed to enjoy the gifts that you have already bestowed on me? Would I really advise you to be niggardly? Never! Nothing is more wicked in a prince, more wicked in a man, than ingratitude. Every virtue has some distractors, every vice some

77. See Suetonius *Claudius* 28.

78. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 17.15.1-2.

79. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 9.9.4.

80. Cf. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 4.15.2.

defenders. Only ingratitude never pleases anyone, and, conversely, gratitude displeases no one. But there are a great many things that you can bestow on those who merit rewards: horses, clothing, arms, plates, money, dwellings, land, and so forth. Follow, however, what is written in the Bible: "Do not bestow your honor on another."⁸¹ I know well that you are ready to share cheerfully with your friends not only your own power but even your very life. But I beg you—not only for your own sake but for the sake of your country, which God gave you to govern. Nothing could be worse, nothing more harmful to the Paduan people, than to obey many chiefly unworthy men placed above them. At present all the citizens regard you as their lord, they all respect, admire, and even venerate you, and they look upon your courtiers not as rulers but as representatives who have been sent out to execute your orders. They see the courtiers as private persons with neither the dignity nor the power that you alone ought to possess. And there are other reasons why what I am saying is important; I myself have observed the unbelievable patience with which several citizen-bodies have suffered the rule of harsh and demanding lords who ruled alone. Conversely, I have seen a people become indignant and rebellious when more than one lord tried to command their respect and obedience. Indeed, unless I am entirely mistaken, we discussed this very subject when you did me the honor to visit me in my rustic retreat a year or so ago.

Now it would be superfluous for me to write you concerning the other type of friends, the ones who are not seeking your wealth but who respect and honor you for what you are. This topic is really unnecessary because you are among the most faithful and upright cultivators of friendship, and since Cicero has already discussed that topic in his elegant little book.⁸² Putting all this into a few words, we can say that in human affairs nothing is sweeter than friendship, and, after virtue, nothing is more sacred. Those who rule over others by their power and ability especially have need of true friends who will stick with them through thick and thin. You should never ask a friend to do anything dishonorable, nor should you ever do anything dishonorable on behalf of a

81. Prov. 5:9.

82. A reference to Cicero's *De amicitia*, from which Petrarch derived some of the ideas in this section.

friend. But nothing honorable is to be denied to a friend. Now you ought to adopt this principle: Among friends everything ought to be held in common, all should act with one accord and by common consent; and what friends agree to ought never to be changed simply because of other expectations, fear, or some imminent danger. Each person ought to love his friend as himself and to overlook any difference in status or wealth. In short, seek to act as Pythagoras orders: "Several persons are gathered in one."⁸³ Likewise, the conditions of true friendship are expressed in Holy Scripture, where in the Acts of the Apostles it is written: "The company of those who believed and who loved one another in Christ was of one head and one soul, and no one of them, whatever he possessed, claimed it for his own use, and all their property was held in common."⁸⁴ If someone were to define friendship as being faithful and lovers in Christ, I certainly would not contradict him, because I do not believe there can be friendship, or any firm or stable relationship for that matter, except that Christ be the foundation. At the same time, however, I am in agreement with the opinion of the pagan philosophers that there can be no true friendship without there being at the same time true wisdom and virtue. In saying this I am not following those who say with a foolish sophistry that there never has been nor ever will be anyone called wise. I am not discussing here impossibilities, but I am content with what the human condition is capable of creating,⁸⁵ and surely we must number among these things the sort of friendship that I have just been talking about. Although it is true that we can actually name very few pairs of friends who knew a perfect and consummate friendship such as the younger Scipio and Laelius were famous for, still there has often been practiced among men a pleasant and fine sort of friendship. In this relationship there was never any fawning adulmentation, nor disparaging remarks, nor backbiting, and no discord or reproach. In fact, there was nothing in these friendships that did not lead to the pleasure and honor of the friends and to peace, harmony, and good fellowship. In these friendships there was nothing false, no dissembling, nothing duplicitous, but only what was pure, candid, and open. In these

83. Quoted in Cicero *De officiis* 1.17.56.

84. Acts 4:32.

85. Cicero *De amicitia* 5.18.

cases many things were held or done in common: advice, work, honors, wealth, talent, and even life itself. We know that such friendships have been frequent in history, and they have often, and rightly, been praised. But I have already spoken at length concerning these things, so it ought to be now an easy matter to distinguish a true friendship from a false one. For the time being enough has been said.

From here on I shall proceed without any preconceived plan and treat what I deem important, setting down with my pen whatever topic may come to mind. I would like to add another topic to those things that I have been discussing about fellowship and generosity toward a friend. The saying of Martial is especially true today: "Wealth is given to none but the rich."⁸⁶ Indeed, there are many crafty and cunning men who do get rich. Cicero has described the system by which you make many benefactions at interest and especially generous ones to those whom you are certain will return your benefactions manyfold.⁸⁷ But you, on the contrary, who never seek any reward from your gifts except to give benefits and obtain from this the happiness of a mind at peace with itself, act contrary to the habits of the greedy. Always make donations to the neediest and do not simply give away your own wealth; when you receive voluntary donations from the rich you should give them to the poor. You have in this matter the precedent of Alexander, who (as I have said) made exactly such benefactions when he was still an outstanding youth and prince.⁸⁸ Nor am I unaware that in what I have just been advising I may seem to be speaking against my own case. Although I am not so rich a man as to arouse envy, as the recipient of both your own generosity and that of your father, I lack nothing, a condition that in my view means the highest wealth. But when I gave this advice I was thinking neither of myself nor of others, but only of your own best interests.

Now there is another thing I want to discuss with you, something that ought to please you very much. I know, of course, that generosity is praised in a prince more than humility. Perhaps this is as it should be. But I really do think that both qualities are

86. Martial *Satirae* 5.81.2.

87. Cicero *De amicitia* 9.31.

88. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 18.21.2.

worthy of praise and that one quality does not necessarily exclude the other, as foolish men often think. For in this matter, as in almost all things, the mob of men is mistaken. They call magnificence pride, and they consider humility to be timidness; both opinions are wrong. I would like you to be a prince who is humble at home among his own people and in prosperity while being magnanimous facing his enemies in adversity. In neither case is such a prince acting timidly or proudly. Indeed, it seems to me that humility is in the first rank of all the virtues. However, some stupid and blind rulers do not feel that they can be truly great lords unless they are swaggering and prideful beyond human dimensions. This is really just the idiocy of ignorant princes. Caligula, that vilest of emperors, was not content with the honors due him as a man; he wished to be worshipped as a god. Consequently, he placed statues of himself in the temples so that he, who was certainly unworthy to be revered as a god, would be worshipped and venerated. He even established his own temple where priests sacrificed victims before his golden effigy.⁸⁹ Caligula did many other things that he thought would bring him greater honor but that really only served to disclose his own stupidity. Is there anyone more evil, more monstrous than the emperor Commodus? Indeed, sacrifices were even made to this most evil son of an illustrious father, just as one would offer to a god. Statues in the form of Hercules were raised to Commodus, who certainly was not a god nor even really a man, but a cruel and ferocious beast.⁹⁰ Even Heliogabalus himself, that vilest of princes and of men, began to be worshipped. All of these emperors merited being murdered on the spot and having their bodies thrown into the Tiber or into sewers.⁹¹

I must confess that I am reluctant to speak of these crimes, and I am saddened and ashamed that these men so polluted with sins were our emperors. I have been discussing this matter, however, not because I enjoy it but because the truth compels me to. In like manner, these northern barbarians of our own time ought to be less angry at me if, when I speak of them, I am moved by a

89. Cf. Suetonius *Caligula* 22.

90. Cf. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 7.9.2.

91. Cf. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 18.17.2-3.

desire to tell the truth more than by hatred.⁹² For I do not hate men; I hate vice, and I hate it more (not less) in us Italians than in other people. Similarly, a farmer is bothered more by rocks, tares, and thistles on his own farm than he is by finding them in another man's field. Yet I must confess that I really cannot bear the vain boasting of that good-for-nothing northern people that is always ready to lie about its accomplishments and brag about what it thinks are its glorious achievements. But, lest I get into a new dispute with those who are not even present, I shall return to my topic.

After those bad emperors, Diocletian wanted to be worshipped like a god and encrusted his shoes as well as his clothing with gems. In this fashion he transformed the dress of Roman emperors into a new style,⁹³ a great novelty for a man otherwise serious and disciplined and one who finally abdicated his throne in order to enjoy a peaceful retirement. Hence, I can only think that this desire for pomp and circumstance derives not from a desire for true glory but from a weak mind. Now it often seems to base persons that when they have attained high office, they have reached heaven, so that losing their perspective they lose control. On the contrary, no earthly honor is of much importance to the truly magnanimous leader. He does not strive to seem more than he really is. For example, the greatest and best of emperors, Caesar Augustus, did not hanker after divine honors, nor did he allow himself to be worshipped.⁹⁴ Indeed, he did not want to be called "lord," even by his children or grandchildren. For he believed (as Suetonius says) that "the name of 'lord' ought always to be abhorred as a curse and an insult."⁹⁵ Hence he forbade the use of the term, and he reproved anyone who dared to use it with a threatening word, a look, or a gesture. Likewise, did Alexander—and I don't mean that king of the Macedons who surpassed everyone in vanity and pride and who, after he had conquered the Persians, was himself conquered by Persian customs. Then impelled by some madness, this Alexander came to want himself worshipped like a

92. Probably an allusion to a French critic of Italy, whom Petrarch had recently inveighed against in his *Invectiva contra eum qui maledixit Italie*.

93. Eutropius 9.26.

94. Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 52

95. Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 53.

god and the son of a god following the Persian belief much to the harm of true religious practice. No, I am speaking of that other Alexander, the Roman emperor, whom we have often mentioned today, and who not only forbade the worship of himself but even enjoined that he be greeted in no other way than "Hello, Alexander."⁹⁶ If anyone dared to greet him with a bow of the head or any grand title, he either banished him from his presence or ridiculed him harshly with a loud guffaw.⁹⁷

Now if I know you and your beliefs well (and after so many years I cannot help but know them), I have no doubt that you bear the title of "lord" more with patience than with pleasure. I have heard you say more than once, and really affirm it almost under oath, that the lordship of Padua was not a pleasure to you and that you would gladly relinquish it if it were not for the fear that an intruder might invade the city and place the Paduan people under oppressive rule and compel you unwillingly to live under a lord. Otherwise, I would much prefer that you were a free private citizen than a ruling lord, for then you could live of your own wealth and you could—as an important man free of the cares of governing—enjoy a quiet and profitable prime of life and, when it came, an honorable old age. From all this it is abundantly clear to me that you do not take pride in something unless you value it very highly. But since it is difficult to change a people's habits and to abolish longstanding customs, you should bear with the Paduan people and let them call you "lord" if they want to. After all, you can always speak of yourself as you see fitting and proper. Now I know that you never apply to yourself in speech or writing the name, "lord." Thus you reject the present usage of most other lords and princes. You sign your name at the bottom of your letters without any title; you never use the plural but always the singular form of address—and not just with superiors but with equals and inferiors as well. Even to me (and there is no one more humble), you never say "we" (as other lords do), but rather you say: "I wish this, I beg this, I order this." When I read these phrases in your letters I am pleased, and I say to myself that if this man really had an inflated opinion of himself his style of writing would show it too. Other princes wish to appear as more than one person, but they are not

96. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 18.18.3.

97. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 17.4–18.1.

even one; in fact, they are nothing. You are doing in this instance a fine thing; unwittingly, and from your own sound instincts, you are imitating the great leaders of ancient Rome. Look at the letters of Julius Caesar and of Augustus (some of which you will find preserved in the works of Josephus and others in Suetonius) and you will never find "we" written there. You will never find "we wish" or "we command," but instead "I wish," "I command," and the like. Indeed, it is—just as you are accustomed to joke—that those who speak of themselves in the plural seem to be naming not just themselves but their wives, children, and servants as well. But you speak only in your own name, and it is you (and no one else) who commands and orders your followers. I have nothing but admiration for your character and your manner and your style of writing, practiced not only by the contemporary leaders I have mentioned but by almost all of the ancient Roman emperors as well. This we know from many letters found in many different books. I mention it in the hope that you will be proud of your style of address while other princes will be made ashamed of theirs, which they consider to be a mark of great status when, in fact, it is an obvious indication of their inferiority and timidity.

Further, to your modesty in speech there is joined another modesty, a modesty in dress that is obvious to everyone. Thus, one modest habit merits approval through the eyes of the beholder while the other comes through the ears, and both together convey through the intellect and the senses the impression of a very modest person and a complete gentleman. Many other lords display themselves before their subjects covered, and even laden down, with gold and finery⁹⁸—rather like altars decorated for a high feast day—and they consider themselves very important merely because they are laden down with precious clothing. You, on the other hand, are content with modest dress, so that you prove to be a lord on account of neither costly clothing nor display but from the dignity of your manner and the authority of your bearing. This is a double good, just as the opposite is a double evil. Vulgar display is hateful in itself, and it often leads to the dangerous disease of imitation. Every people strives to imitate the deeds and habits of its prince. Hence, there is that very true saying

98. See Cicero *Tusculanae disputationes* 1.14.34, quoting Ennius.

that there is nothing more harmful to the state than the bad example of its prince. And in complete truth, the poet says: "The whole world follows the king's example."⁹⁹ There you have it: the bad habits of princes are dangerous not just to themselves but to everyone. Concerning this there is a very apposite passage in the third book of Cicero's *On the Laws*:

For it is not so mischievous that men of high position do evil—though this evil is bad enough in itself—as it is that these men have so many imitators. For if you will turn your thoughts back to history, you will see that the character or our most prominent men has been reproduced in the whole state; whatever change took place in the lives of the prominent men has also taken place in the whole people. And we can be much more confident of the soundness of this than of what so pleased our beloved Plato. He thought that the characteristics of a nation could be changed by changing the character of its music. But I believe that a transformation takes place in a nation's character when the habits and mode of living of its aristocracy are changed. For this reason, men of the upper class who do wrong are especially dangerous to the state, because they not only indulge in vicious practices themselves, but also infect the whole commonwealth with their vices, and not only because they are corrupt, but also because they corrupt others and do more harm by their bad example than by their sin.¹⁰⁰

So much for Cicero. Indeed, I myself, when I have been with you and others, used to say: "This prince will teach boasting to no one; he will lead no one into pompous ways." And I have often reflected upon what Livy wrote about Hannibal: "He was equal to all others in dress, he stood out only in arms and in horses."¹⁰¹ However, this is not such great praise for a soldier in time of war, when, of necessity, all comforts must be excluded. You show modesty in times of peace and prosperity, which are the mothers of immoderation and luxury. Therefore, when I consider your dress, the matter

99. Claudian *De quarto consulatu Honorii Augusti* 299–300.

100. Cicero *De legibus* 3.14.31.

101. Cf. Livy *Ab urbe condita* 21.4.8.

ought not to be compared with that of Hannibal, which I have just been describing, but with that of Augustus, under whose reign all kings and people enjoyed a universal peace. Concerning him it is written that he wore only clothes made at home by his wife, his sister, his daughter, and his granddaughters.¹⁰²

Now there are many topics that I still might discuss if I did not fear that I might exhaust your patience (perhaps already wearied with all that I have said up to now). But there is one topic that I simply cannot pass over, a practice that will make princes both respected and venerated (and indeed on this theme you need no exhortation). In short, I appeal that you honor famous men and hold them in esteem and friendship. You are so eager to do this that you could not do otherwise (even if you wanted to)—your very nature would stop you—for a leader does nothing better than what he does following his own nature. Custom is a strong force, training is stronger still, nature is more so, but if all three are joined together it becomes the most effective. Now I view as outstanding those men who are set apart from the common herd of humanity by some singular quality; this could be outstanding justice or holiness (which these days is virtually nonexistent), or military skill and experience, or profound learning in literature and science. Although (as Cicero says in the first book of *On Duties*) "most people think that military science is more important than knowledge of government, their opinion is really quite mistaken."¹⁰³ He has pointed out many Greek and Roman leaders who were examples of this fact; Themistocles and Solon, Lysander and Lycurgus, and from the Romans, Gaius Marius and Marcus Scaurus, Gneus Pompeius and Quintus Catulus, the younger Scipio and Publius Nasica, and since Cicero wanted fame and glory for himself, he also added his own name to the list.¹⁰⁴ And indeed this judgment is not without justice, for I do not doubt that Anthony did no more for the good of Rome when he defeated Catiline on the field of battle than did Cicero himself when he exposed Catiline's horrible conspiracy to the Senate and threw the conspirators into prison.

102. Cf. Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 73.

103. Cicero *De officiis* 1.22.74.

104. Cicero *De officiis* 1.22.75–76 provided Petrarch with this list of great leaders from antiquity.

Among those honored for their abilities in governing, the first place ought to go to learned men. And among these learned men, a major place should go to those whose knowledge in law is always very useful to the state. If, indeed, love of and devotion to justice is added to their knowledge of law, these citizens are (as Cicero puts it) "learned not just in the law, but in justice."¹⁰⁵ However, there are those who follow the law but do no justice, and these are unworthy to bear the name of the legal profession. For it is not enough simply to have knowledge; you must want to use it. A good lawyer adds good intentions to his legal knowledge. Indeed, there have been many lawyers who have added luster to ancient Rome and other places: Adrianus Julius Celsus, Salvius Julianus, Neratius Priscus, Antonius Scaevola, Severus Papinianus, Alexander Domitius Ulpianus, Fabius Sabinus, Julius Paulus, and many others.¹⁰⁶ And you too (as much as our own times permit) have by the patronage of your university added honor to your country. There are other kinds of learned men, some of whom you can depend on for advice and learned conversation, and (as Alexander used to say) invent literary tales.¹⁰⁷ One reads that Julius Caesar, in like fashion, used to confer Roman citizenship on doctors of medicine and on teachers of the liberal arts.¹⁰⁸ Now, among learned men there is no doubt that we ought to give preference to those who teach the knowledge of sacred things (or what we call theology), provided that these men have kept themselves free from any foolish sophistries.

That very wise emperor Augustus used to bestow patronage on learned men to encourage them to remain in Rome, and hope of such a reward stimulated others to study, for at that time Roman citizenship was a highly valued honor. Indeed, when St. Paul claimed that he was a Roman citizen, the tribune judging the case said to him: "I myself have at a high price obtained this status."¹⁰⁹ You, my great lord, do not have such rewards in your gift, but you can do this: you can give learned and distinguished men

105. Cicero *Orationes Philippicae* 9.5.10.

106. Petrarch derived this list of famous legal experts from the time of the Roman Empire mainly from his reading of the *Scriptores historiae Augustae*, *passim*.

107. *Scriptores historiae Augustae* 18.34.6.

108. Suetonius *Divus Julius* 42.

109. Acts 22:28.

dedicated to honorable studies a place among your citizen-body. So be generous and kind to scholars, and Padua will be filled with learned men and its university restored to its ancient glory. Nothing entices outstanding men so much as the friendship and patronage of a prince. Caesar Augustus gathered together his famous troop of scholars and artists with his hospitality and patronage rather than with the power of his empire. He numbered among his friends Cicero in the beginning, and then Asinius Pollio, Valerius Messala, and Parius Geminus, all great orators, as well as Vergil and Horace, outstanding poets to whom he wrote personal letters. It was clear from these letters that the supreme ruler of the inhabited world treated these two rustics—one from Mantua, the other from Verona—not just as his equals but even as his superiors. By his example Augustus taught others that no ruler should be ashamed to enjoy the friendship of commoners who had been ennobled by their own genius and learning. Who could possibly be ashamed of such a friendship if the Emperor Augustus were not ashamed of it? Later on he was also friendly with Tucca and Varius of Cremona and with Ovid of Sulmona, though Augustus did eventually find Ovid unworthy and banished him from his court. And there were others, including Marcus Varro, perhaps the most learned of all, and the Paduan Titus Livy, the father of history who, if he were alive today, would be your fellow citizen. So at this one moment in history these and many others were gathered around Augustus so that he was made glorious as much by these illustrious men as by the conquests of all his Roman legions. Can the thirty-five tribes of Rome or her forty-four valorous legions really be compared to that one great man, Vergil, who so honored Augustus with his friendship? Vergil still lives by his fame; the others have long since perished. Indeed, learned men attracted by this famous imperial generosity came from Greece as well as from Italy. Now I am asking you: where can a talented and intelligent man be happier and lead a better life than under the benevolent gaze of a just and generous prince? I sincerely believe that if it were not for the bonds of your own generosity, a great many scholars who have come to Padua would soon leave. For my part, I praise and laud your patronage. Although soldiers can at times be useful to you and perform good services in time of war, it is only learned men who can provide the right advice at the right

moment, and thus ensure the fame of your name. Moreover, they can show you the proper road to heaven, you can mount on the wings of their expert advice, and, if you get lost, you can find your way again by following their counsel.

But I have said enough, I fear even too much. At the beginning of this letter I had intended that I would exhort you, at its end, to correct the morals of your subjects. Yet I now think this would be an impossible task, for it is always difficult to change what had evolved out of custom. It cannot be done by force of law or by kings. Hence, I have changed my aim because it is always useless to attempt the impossible. However, there is one custom among the Paduan people that I cannot overlook. And I will not simply ask you, but I shall implore you, to correct this public evil with your own hand. Now don't say to me that this evil that I want you to correct is not unique to Padua but common to many other cities. This is a question of your own dignity, and just as you have been the beneficiary of many individual gifts, so that you now excel your contemporaries, Padua has received many gifts from you so that it excels all the neighboring cities.

Now you should certainly know, best of men, that it is written in the Old Testament: "Everyone dies."¹¹⁰ The New Testament says: "It is established that every man dies once."¹¹¹ And among the pagan authors you find: "Death is certain, which day it will happen is uncertain."¹¹² Even if it were not written in any book, still death is certain, as our common nature tells us. Now I do not know whether it is because of human nature or from some long-standing custom that at the death of our close friends and relatives we can scarcely contain our grief and tears, and that our funeral services are often attended by wailings and lamentations. But I do know that scarcely ever has this propensity for public grief been so deep-rooted in other cities as it is in yours. Someone dies—and I do not care whether he is a noble or a commoner, the grief displayed by the commoners is certainly no less manifest, and perhaps more so, than that of the nobles, for the plebs are more apt to show their emotions and less likely to be moved by what is proper; as soon as he breathes his last, a great howling and torrent of tears

110. 2 Kings 13:14.

111. Hebrews 9:27.

112. Cf. Cicero *Tusculanae disputationes* 1.48.115.

begins. Now I am not asking you to forbid expressions of grief. This would be difficult and probably impossible, given human nature. But what Jeremiah says is true: "You should not bemoan the dead, nor bathe the corpse in tears."¹¹³ As that great poet Euripides wrote in *Crespontes*: "Considering the evil of our present existence, we ought to lament at our birth and rejoice at our death."¹¹⁴ But these philosophic opinions are not well known, and, in any case, the common people would find them unthinkable and strange.

Therefore, I will tell you what I am asking. Take an example: Some old dowager dies, and they carry her body into the streets and through the public squares accompanied by loud and indecent wailing so that someone who did not know what was happening could easily think that here was a madman on the loose or that the city was under enemy attack. Now, when the funeral cortège finally gets to the church, the horrible keening redoubles, and at the very spot where there ought to be hymns to Christ or devoted prayers for the soul of the deceased in a subdued voice or even silence, the walls resound with the lamentations of the mourners and the holy altars shake with the wailing of women. All this simply because a human being has died. This custom is contrary to any decent and honorable behavior and unworthy of any city under your rule. I wish you would have it changed. In fact, I am not just advising you, I am (if I may) begging you to do so. Order that wailing women should not be permitted to step outside their homes; and if some lamentation is necessary to the grieved, let them do it at home and do not let them disturb the public thoroughfares.

I have said to you perhaps more than I should, but less than I would like to say. And if it seems to you, illustrious sir, that I am mistaken in one place or another, I beg your pardon, and I ask you to consider only the good advice. May you rule your city long and happily. Farewell. Arquà, the 28th of November.

113. Jeremiah 22:10.

114. Cf. Cicero *Tusculanae disputationes* 1.48.115, quoting Euripides.